Impressionism & Post-Romantic Music
In Painting and Music
What is Impressionism?

• art capturing the image of an object as someone would see it if they just caught a glimpse

• a visual movement:
  – *first in painting*
  – *later in music*
Impressionist painting

• work produced between about 1867 and 1886

• Produced by a group of artists who shared a set of related approaches and techniques.

• Characteristics of Impressionism: an attempt to accurately, and objectively record visual reality in effects of light and color.
What is Impressionist Music?

- No clean, hard outlines or edges or shapes in the paintings nor in the music.
- The sounds were "painted" using richly colored harmonies.
When is Impressionist Music?

- 1890 – 1925
- Primary Composers
  - Claude Debussy
1. Bitonality

- Two different harmonies at once.
- Creates fuzzy harmonies. Traditional harmonic progressions are clean and straightforward.
- Think of music written in two different keys at the same time.
- An example is Debussy's piano piece, La Puerta Del Vino. Right hand plays in one key, the left in another key. Played together, they create bitonality.
2. Fuzzy chords

• Take lots of notes and pile them up, one on top of another, and you can get some pretty interesting sounds.

• Listen to Debussy's: *Claire de lune.*
3. Modes

- These are special scales that have been around for a long time.

- They were used by composers until about the time of the Renaissance.

- A wonderful piece by Debussy that is based entirely on modes is Fetes (Festival). The Dorian mode is one of the scales that is used in this piece.
4. New Sounds Suggest Exotic Locations

- Composers like Maurice Ravel borrowed ideas from places like Spain, Asia, Greece, and composers like Maurice Ravel borrowed ideas from places like Spain, Asia, Greece, and jazz from America to "paint" these sounds into their music.

- *Bolero* is an excellent example of this new, exotic sound.

- *Example with a Spanish flavor is Ravel's piano piece,* "Alborado del Gracioso."

![Image of palm trees]
5. Penatonic Scales

- **Scales with just 5 notes.**

- **This old scale has been around for ages**

- **Music of China and the American Indian use this scale**

- **Debussy's “Girl with the Flaxen Hair,” is a good example of a piece based on this 5-tone scale.**
6. Whole Tone Scale

• This is a scale with no half steps.
• Listen to L'isle joyeuse (Island of Pleasure) by Claude Debussy.
Music

- Group of artists and composers that fit into another form other than impressionism
- The term “Post Impressionist,” is often associated with the artist Van Vogh and the composer Maurice Ravel

Post Romanticism is described as a challenging genre to place descriptive boundaries, but the common thread of the artists is they wrote works on a massive scale. For example, composer, Gustav Mahler.
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

- An example of a successful composer inspired by Claude Debussy but followed his own musical course to branch out into his own style.
- Grew up in Paris, and trained as a pianist.
- 1889 attended the Paris Conservatory and studied under Gabriel Faure (like Debussy).
- Similar to Debussy, had a style of “extended harmonies,” but applied them to more dance-like rhythms.
The Music of Maurice Ravel

- Considered a masterful orchestrator (like Berlioz before him)
- Many of his masterful pieces started as piano works and were later transcribed for Orchestra
  - Pavane for a Dead Infant
  - Noble and Sentimental Waltzes
  - Lament for Couperin
  - A setting of Mussorgsky’s “Pictures from an Exhibition” (written for ballet)
Bolero
Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

- Born and raised in Bohemia, with the bulk of his life centered around Vienna, Austria
- Entered the Vienna Music Conservatory at the age of 15
- Summer job as a conductor for light opera companies.
- Worked his way through the ranks as a conductor until he earned the title of Director of the Royal Opera of Budapest.
- From there he became Director of the Hamburg Orchestra
Gustav Mahler - Bio

-1899 landed the “dream job,” as Conductor of the Vienna State Opera
-Publically converted to Catholicism due to anti-semitic feelings throughout Europe.
-This change allowed him to earn his position in Vienna. Spent 10 years there until political infighting at the Opera forced him to resign.
-Character traits: a perfectionist as a conductor and director. He didn’t mind stepping on toes to see things were done his way. As a result he made a number of enemies over the years.
Gustav Mahler - Bio

- Accepted a position in America as the Director of the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic.
- Made a great deal of money, but has less freedom to program works, and rule with an iron fist.
- Found himself in conflict with management as a result.
- 1911 A previous heart condition worsened and developed an infection in his bloodstream. He left NY mid-season for Paris for an unsuccessful treatment, and eventually returned to Vienna where he passed away.
- His life was marred by tragedy: he had an abusive father; several siblings died of illness (another from suicide), and he felt he never quite fit in.
- He had several complicated love affairs, and had a tumultuous relationship and marriage with Alma Schindler.
- Together they had two children. Their oldest daughter died in 1907, not long after he had finished a song cycle entitled “Songs on the Death of Children”
Music of Mahler

- He blamed himself for his daughter’s death.
- Much of his compositional output thereafter was based on human mortality.

- His Symphonies are considered his greatest works.
  - Symphony No. 1 the “Titan”
  - Symphony No. 2 “Resurrection”
  - Symphony No. 4 considered the most reserved, (but elegantly beautiful)
  - Symphony No. 5 returned to pure instrumental
  - Symphony No. 6 & 7 purely instrumental
  - Symphony No. 8 “Symphony of a Thousand”
  - Symphony No. 9 returned to pure instrumental
Mahler - Symphonies

Symphony No. 4

Symphony No. 8
Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)

-may have been the oldest composition student in the professional music world.
-Displayed an early talent for singing, a violinist and organist.
-But it took him years to perfect his own approach to composition
-Like Bach, Handel, Mozart and Haydn, he was a student of counterpoint and structure. Like Bach he was a talented improviser.
Anton Bruckner (Bio)

- Worked many years as a teacher, before maturing as a composer.
- Eventually discovered his “compositional style,” when he was inspired by the works of Wagner.
- His compositions reflect Wagner’s influences, but they are not as “heavy” as the operatic master.
- His works display his firm grip on contrapuntal techniques (see Bach).
The Works of Bruckner

- His compositions didn’t appear until after 1860, even then he was unsatisfied.
- Many of his Symphonies underwent many revisions.
- Deeply spiritual man, with several odd personality traits.

Symphony No. 4, Mvmt. 4

Symphony No. 7, Mvmt. 2
Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

- Finland’s most famous composer
- A few of his works are nationalistic in nature including his most famous tone poem “Finlandia.”
- His music is often described as somber, grand, bold, and sweeping.
- Others suggest that even when not writing in a nationalistic style, he couldn’t help but include aspects of his surrounding environment.
• He studied violin, in which he hoped to become a soloist.
• He began composing at a young age and decided to turn his focus toward that.
• His compositional styles were inspired by the works of Tchaikovsky and later Bruckner.
• Thematic development became one of his most unique trademarks:

  • “Most original in Sibelius’s music are his themes, his technique of thematic development and his treatment of form.” - Donald J. Grout
Music
Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

- His music continues to be the most popular in symphony halls and opera houses worldwide.
- Like Mahler, he was a respected conductor of both symphonic and operatic works.
- Mahler, however, used loose programmatic ideas to organize his music, while Strauss wrote a number of vivid programmatic tone poems and symphonies to tell specific musical stories or deep philosophical views.
- His most famous symphonic tone poems include:
  - Death and Transfiguration
  - Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks
  - A Hero’s Life (in response to critics)
  - Sinfonia domestica
  - Opening sequence to “Also Sprach Zarathustra”
Richard Strauss

- Zarathustra is not a well known pieces, but the opening has been used and parodied by everyone from comedians to cartoon characters, to political figures.
- It was based on the prose-poem by philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and is considered “moody,” compared to his other works.
- Till Eulenspiegel remains his most popular and accessible program piece, and has similar programmatic features as Belioz’s Symphonie Fantastique.
- Wrote several other popular instrumental works still frequently heard: Concerto for Horn and Orchestra.
• His career as an Opera Composer spans 40 Year’s
• First major success came in 1905 “Salomie,” based on the controversial play by Oscar Wilde
• He followed this success up with the dissonant “Elektra,” a chilling story of insanity and revenge based on the play by Sophocles
• 1911 He toned things down a bit with the satire “The Knight of the Rose”
  — Used three soaring female voices to convey powerful emotions of themes of love, guilt and resignation to fate.
  — “Pants” roles, meaning a woman playing a male character
Strauss - Music

Zarathustra

Famous Trio from The Knight of the Rose
Sergei Rachmaninov

- One of the most abused names in classical music (after Tchaikovsky)
- Best Remembered for his Piano Concertos
- Most often played piece: Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini (For Piano and Orchestra)
- An accomplished Pianist
- The rest of his compositional output is considered less important
- Like Mahler was for German Romanticism, Rachmaninoff marks the end of the “true Romantic spirit in Russia.”
More on Rachmaninov

- His Music is more universal in nature
- Less Nationalistic compared to his Russian counterparts
- He composed three operas and three symphonies
- He also composed several symphonic poems/concert overtures, various chamber pieces and choral works
- Incorporated several liturgical traditions into his music (particularly in his choral music)
His Music

Ave Maria from "The Great Vespers of the Russian Church" (Op. 37/1)

"Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini"
Sir Edward Elgar

- 1857-1934
- British Composer who wrote a number of excellent works
- Wrote a popular “folk” piece entitled “Enigma Variations”

Best known, however, for one piece in particular “Land of Hope and Glory.”

Also known as “Pomp and Circumstance.”
His Music
Gustav Holst

- Another Great British Composer of the Post-Romantic Era.
- Neo-Classical in structure and form.
- Known for his works for British Brass Band and choral works:
  - Suite No. 1 in E Flat
  - Suite No. 2 in F Major
  - Hammersmith, but is best known for…
Chapter 7 Comparative Essay Quiz